

Message Text

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73

ACTION ARA-10

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TAGS: SWEL IBRD BF

SUBJ: POTENTIAL HEALTH THREAT TO THE BAHAMAS AND U.S.

1. THE EMBASSY IN CONTEXT OF CASP REVIEW ISOLATED A CHALLENGE TO US INTERESTS IN INTERNATIONAL HEALTH WHICH IN ITS VIEW REQUIRES CONSIDERATION AND ACTION BY US GOVERNMENT.

2. IBRD IN ITS INITIAL REPORT ON THE BAHAMAS (REPORT NO. 390A-BM-SEE PAGE 53) PUBLISHED IN JUNE 1974 COMMENTS THAT SEWERAGE IS ONE OF THE MOST URGENT DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS OF THE BAHAMAS, PARTICULARLY ON NEW PROVIDENCE ISLAND AND IN NASSAU PROPER. THREE MAIN TYPES OF DISEASE ARE PRESENT IN SOME AREAS OF NEW PROVIDENCE; TYPHOID, INFECTIOUS HEPATITIS, AND AMOEBIASIS. THE REPORT FURTHER STATES THAT ALTHOUGH THE INCIDENCE OF TYPHOID IS SMALL, AN EPIDEMIC CANNOT BE RULED OUT GIVEN THE PRESENT CONDITIONS IN CERTAIN AREAS OF NEW PROVIDENCE.

3. A TYPHOID EPIDEMIC ON NEW PROVIDENCE NOT ONLY WOULD HAVE A DEVASTATING EFFECT ON THE BAHAMIAN ECONOMY WHICH IS OVERWHELMINGLY DEPENDENT ON TOURISM (ESTIMATED AT 77 PERCENT OF GNP) BUT ALSO WOULD POSE A HEALTH THREAT TO THE US MAINLAND

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GIVEN THE VOLUME OF DAILY TOURIST TRAFFIC BETWEEN NASSAU AND

THE US.

4. GCOB IS AWARE OF THE NEED TO CORRECT THE SEWERAGE PROBLEM AND IS CURRENTLY SEEKING IBRD FINANCING OF A COMBINED WATER/SEWERAGE SYSTEM PROJECT. THE ENGINEERING DESIGN FOR THE SEWERAGE PORTION OF THE SYSTEM (CONTRACT HELD BY BRITISH FIRM OF HOWARD HUMPHRIES) WILL TAKE TEN MONTHS TO BE COMPLETED ONCE IT IS BEGUN. WORK CANNOT BEGIN, HOWEVER, UNTIL IBRD COMPLETES ITS INITIAL REPORT ON FINANCING. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT REPORT WILL BE FAVORABLE. EMBASSY ALSO UNDERSTANDS THAT UNDP WILL COMMIT \$250,000 FOR FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR SURVEY OF OTHER SEWERAGE AND HOUSING NEEDS.

5. EMBASSY HAS LEARNED UNOFFICIALLY THAT IBRD HAS INFORMED BAHAMIANS THAT DECISION ON FINANCING WATER/SEWERAGE SYSTEM PROJECT WILL NOT BE PUT BEFORE THE IBRD BOARD FOR AT LEAST A YEAR. IN BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES THIS MEANS CONSTRUCTION OF NEW SEWERAGE SYSTEM WOULD NOT BEGIN UNTIL END OF 1976 OR BEGINNING OF 1977.

6. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT US GOVERNMENT SHOULD (1) EXPRESS AN INTEREST IN IBRD ACTING AS QUICKLY AS IS BUREAUCRATICALLY POSSIBLE TO APPROVE PROJECT FINANCING OR (2) AT LEAST, ENCOURAGE IBRD TO GIVE GCOB ASSURANCE OF IBRD FUTURE SUPPORT FOR PROJECT SO WORK CAN BEGIN ON ENGINEERING DESIGN. GCOB KNOWS FROM OUR ENQUIRIES HERE THAT WE ARE ALERT TO MUTUAL INTEREST IN THE PROBLEM AND MINEXTAFF ADDERLEY HAS SAID GCOB WOULD CONSIDER US SUPPORT FOR PROJECT AND EFFORTS TO MOVE ALONG APPROVAL OF PROJECT FINANCING AS THE GESTURE OF A FRIENDLY NATION. WE WOULD APPRECIATE OPPORTUNITY TO ADVISE GCOB OF SPECIFIC STEPS WE TAKE IN SUPPORT OF THEIR APPLICATION NOT ONLY AS COURTESY, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF OUR VERY REAL MUTUAL INTEREST.

7. EMBASSY DOES NOT WISH TO PLAY ALARMIST ROLE IN THIS MATTER. EMBASSY ECONOFF HAS DISCUSSED POTENTIAL REPEAT POTENTIAL EPIDEMIC WITH LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS WHO ARE UNANIMOUS IN THEIR CONCERN AT LOCAL SANITARY CONDITIONS, PARTICULARLY IN RESIDENTIAL AREA OF BAHAMIANS WHO PROVIDE LARGEST PORTION OF HOTEL WORK FORCE, AND THEY ALL BELIEVE A SEWERAGE SYSTEM IS URGENTLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REQUIRED. INSTANCE OF TYPHOID ON NEW PROVIDENCE IS STILL SMALL (ONLY ONE OR TWO REPORTED CASES EVERY ONE OR TWO YEARS) BUT HEALTH OFFICIALS BELIEVE AN EPIDEMIC COULD DEVELOP WITHOUT AN ADEQUATE WARNING PERIOD. IN THIS SITUATION AND GIVEN SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR U.S. AS WELL AS BAHAMAS, EMBASSY BELIEVES DEPARTMENT SHOULD CONSIDER TAKING ALL APPROPRIATE STEPS TO ENCOURAGE EARLY IBRD ACTION WITH RESPECT TO WATER/SEWERAGE PROJECT APPLICATION.

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